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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [GG](#)  
SUBJECT: RULING PARTY SET TO WIN MAJORITY IN GEORGIAN  
PARLIAMENT

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: As the election campaign wraps up its final day, Post predicts that President Saakashvili's ruling United National Movement (UNM) party will easily win a majority of the 150 seats in Georgia's May 21 parliamentary elections. The UNM may even win the 100 seats needed to obtain a constitutional majority, although President Saakashvili has told us he prefers to receive a smaller majority to allow more opposition parties to enter into Parliament. UNM's political consulting company, Greenberg Quinlan Rosner (GQR), told the international media May 19 that its latest polls show UNM obtaining 54 percent of likely votes. Before a single vote has been cast, the Joint Opposition has called for rallies and protests "if the results are rigged," and defined that as the UNM winning more than about 80 seats. The potential for sporadic violence after the elections remains high, despite the fact that NGOs assess the pre-election period and election administration as improved over January's presidential election. The government is ready to respond to any provocations. End Summary.

UNM Poised to Win Big

12. (C) As the election campaign wraps up its final day, Post predicts that President Saakashvili's ruling UNM party will easily win a majority of the 150 seats in Georgia's May 21 parliamentary elections. Our assessment is that UNM will likely win 56 of the 75 majoritarian seats as well as approximately 44 of the 75 party-list seats, likely giving UNM around 100 seats -- the number needed for a constitutional majority. A variety of sources agree with this assessment. On May 19, UNM-pollster, Greenberg Quinlan Rosner (GQR) released to the international media (Georgian media is prohibited from publishing poll results within 48 hours of the election) its final, nation-wide poll results before the election. After allocating undecided voters who are likely to vote (19 percent), GQR believes that the UNM would currently take 54 percent of the party list vote, the Joint Opposition 19 percent, Giorgi Targamadze's Christian-Democratic Movement (CDM) 17 percent, Labor 6 percent, and the Republicans less than the threshold at 4 percent. The UNM is polling at 56 percent of the vote nationwide in the 75, single-mandate majoritarian races. GQR believes that if their survey results are indicative of the final vote, UNM would have a strong majority in the next Parliament, and potentially a two-thirds majority.

13. (C) There are a lot of reasons for UNM's likely strong showing in the elections. UNM has the incumbent advantage and historically voters in Georgia, and especially in the regions, vote for the incumbent party. In addition, UNM possesses a significant financial advantage. Although the opposition parties are visibly campaigning more than during the Presidential elections in January, UNM's number 5 candidates are much more visible on billboards and posters in

the capital. In the regions, UNM campaigned sooner and harder than any other party. The only party that came close was Giorgi Targamadze's Christian Democrats, and his party's steady rise in the polls indicate that he has used wisely the USAID-funded training from the International Republican Institute (IRI). Finally, UNM's trump card is President Saakashvili himself, who has taken center stage in the media recently on a whole host of issues from Abkhazia to elections. His popularity according to GQR polls remains in the stratospheric 80 percent -- despite the domestic crisis of last year. The unpopularity of the opposition cannot be overstated. Although IRI estimated the Joint Opposition leader Levan Gachechiladze's popularity in January as 60 percent, GQR said it stood at 19 percent on May 19. We attribute this fall to the fact that people are tired of the threats of violence and unending protests that have become synonymous with the opposition. One big disappointment is that the Republican Party, one of the more moderate forces in the opposition, is not polling high enough to get seats in Parliament on the party list ballot. They may receive a few seats in majoritarian contests, but it will take 7 seats in the new Parliament to form a faction.

#### The Joint Opposition, Ready to Rumble

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14. (C) The Joint Opposition, the 9-party election bloc, composed of the United National Council of Opposition (UNC) and New Rightists, continues to appeal to the streets in the waning days of the campaign. In addition to two Joint Opposition affiliated protests that turned violent, one of which was staged at the home of the CEC Chair, leader Gachechiladze announced the Joint Opposition's plan to rally

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at the Central Election Commission at 11 p.m. on May 21 to "release the real election results." Conservative Joint Opposition leader MP Zviad Dzidziguri reportedly told IRI that his election bloc is prepared to accept a UNM victory of around 80 seats. However, if early indications show significantly more seats for the UNM, the UNC protests may turn violent. Dzidziguri said UNC supporters could enter the CEC and burn protocols in an attempt to force a new election.

IRI also reported that UNM officials in Samegrelo region -- where some predicted potential violence by the opposition -- have not responded to negative campaigning by the Joint Opposition. IRI believes that if Samegrelo remains calm, violence in Tbilisi may be more likely. (Note: The CEC will operate from two locations on Election Night with OSCE Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) representatives at both locations. End note.)

15. (C) In addition to pressing the OSCE Ambassadorial Working Group to issue a strong public statement condemning violence (emailed to EUR/CARC), and DAS Matt Bryza and the Ambassador's warnings to opposition leaders, Post has raised with the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MOIA) the forecast of potential violence and asked for the Georgian Government's plan in response. The MOIA plans to disband any protests that turn violent or threaten to disrupt the work of the CEC.

MOIA Minister Merabishvili is aware of the likely negative public perception in the event of an excessive response. Still, it appears that opposition expectations for the elections are overly rosy and their disappointment with the result and penchant for turning to violence makes for a combustible combination.

#### Pre-Election Environment Improved

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16. (C) The pre-election environment and the election administration are much improved compared to January's presidential election. Both sides have campaigned the past two weeks. The Ambassador saw in Kutaisi on May 18 that nine of the top ten candidates had billboards displayed in the city (in Tbilisi, UNM billboards still dominate, as they did

in December). ODIHR states that the government is much more active in trying to promote fair elections, and the number of complaints regarding intimidation and the election administration are considerably less than four months ago. Concern persists that courts are dismissing complaints and appeals without review of evidence. Still, the situation has improved overall. The central actors of the GOG understand the importance of these elections and that there is no need to cheat. The regional UNM party leaders may not understand this as well, and we expect less professionalism in the conduct of the election in the areas outside the capital. Based on the experience of the Presidential elections, all eyes will be focused on the count and tabulation of the results to assess these elections.

#### Observation and Results

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17. (C) ODIHR has 14 long-term observation teams, and 380 short-term observers, deployed around the country. We expect ODIHR's Election Observation Mission to make its first statement about the election at 5:00 p.m. (local time) on May 22. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe will issue the statement jointly with ODIHR. Local, US-funded NGOs ISFED and nGnI will be conducting parallel vote tabulation (PVT) and parallel turnout tabulation (PTT), which will provide for a verification against the final result and which should be released sometime on May 22. The U.S. Embassy is joining forces with the UK Embassy to field 38 observation teams (28 U.S.; 10 UK) spread throughout the country, but focused on the minority regions which had unusually high turnout rates in the January election. Half of these teams will be static and remain at one Precinct Election Commission (PEC) from before the opening through the final vote count. The other half will move from precinct to precinct. We coordinated with the OSCE, other missions, and the opposition to identify and prioritize observation at PECs which were problematic during the Presidential elections.

TEFFT